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ABSTRACT

The increasingly politicized environment of schools should be examined in the context of the board of education's legal powers and the politics of education. Historically, the superintendent of schools has dominated policy making, though school boards' influence has been noted in areas such as finance and physical facilities, and in smaller communities. This study examined the perceptions of school board members and superintendents as to their own and each other's influence in eight areas of policy. A questionnaire was administered to 62 New Jersey school districts, and 31 elected school boards were matched with 31 appointed school boards in two size categories of assessed valuation per pupil and three enrollment sizes. Five null hypotheses were tested through analysis of variance to determine whether there are significant differences in (1) the perceptions of superintendents in districts with elected and appointed schools boards as to who decided policy, (2) the perceptions of board members in districts with elected and appointed school boards, (3) the perceptions of superintendents and board members in districts with elected school boards, (4) the perceptions of superintendents and board members in districts with appointed school boards, and (5) the interaction of five categories of mean scores in the eight policy areas. Disparities between superintendents' and board members' perceptions suggest that superintendents should reevaluate their relationship to politics. A bibliography is included. (MCG)

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ABSTRACT

The increasingly politicized environment of schools should be examined in the context of board of education's legal powers and the politics of education. Historically, the superintendent of schools has dominated the policy making process although school boards' influence has been noted in areas such as finance and physical facilities and in smaller communities.

This study examined school boards and superintendents in New Jersey and found school boards and their superintendents disagreeing more than they were agreeing on their perceptions of who controls in the policy making process. This finding agrees with several other studies that found boards and superintendents do not agree on their roles in policy making.

Since educational administration textbooks typically describe the function of the superintendent as the implementor of policies formulated by the board of education, does this suggest the superintendents need to reevaluate their need for public support? The superintendent's role as a nonpolitical expert should also be re-examined.

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HOW COMPATIBLE? Board of Education's Power and Politics of Education

School boards set policy and administrators implement them. The selection of a superintendent of schools is, undoubtedly, one of the school board's most important tasks. There are many ways that school boards and superintendents can work together in this policy process. In 1964, Kerr felt the school board allowed the superintendent to control policy by legitimizing, or making policy legal through their voting at board meetings, the policies the superintendent recommended. This was in keeping with the view that the superintendent was the expert on school policy matters.

But control of the schools has never been a static condition. Boyd (1976) pointed out that there were drastic changes taking place in the previous 20 year period. While there was increased professionalization of public education, the question that was still unresolved was whether educators should be nonpolitical, educational experts or political strategists. By 1980, the increasingly politicized environment of schools had been noted by Mosher (1980, p. 110), Tucker and Zeigler (1980, p. 67) and The American School Board Journal (1980, p. 17). Boyd (1983, pp. 1-29) enumerated areas of decline in public education including the legitimacy of administrative authority. He found "redistributive" politics created a new view of politics of who gets "what, when and how" and raised the level of conflict in policy making.

Cistone (1977, p. 89) addressed the lack of knowledge about policy making:

> Although public policy making dates back to the dawn of organized human society, remarkably little is known about it except for discrete bits of information, a small inventory of studies, and a few suggested frameworks and models for policy analysis.

As Boyd (1973) also pointed out, educators prefer to repress conflict and when "confronted with conflict which can not be avoided, they frequently discover they lack the skills needed to resolve it." Drachler (1977, p. 189) exposes the paucity of research:

> ...school admininistrators who claim that scholars do not recognize the complexities of school governance have contributed little to the literature of educational politics. If practitioners have a theoretical basis for their political behavior, or for an assessment of their political experience, they have not revealed it.

The school climate had been studied by researchers such as Gross (1958) who found areas of disagreement between school boards and superintendents on rights and responsibilities. Hodges(1966) and Stirling (1966) also found areas of disagreement. Kirst summarized his findings (1970, p. v) "... the political influence of the superintendent (and/or the bureaucracy) appears to dominate most spheres of urban and surburban policy."

By 1974, Zeigler and Jennings (p. 15) agreed that educators are in control of everyday policy matters, but found boards of education have traditionally influenced "finance, physical structures, oversight of the superintendent's performance and episodic crisis in controversial areas." They also mention the "critical safety valve function" of the board because the public can use the board to express pent-up dissatisfactions with the schools. Boyd (1976, pp. 564-75)finds the types of "external issues that are likely to arouse citizen interest are construction, facilities and finance. He comments that professionals dominate in larger, more heterogenous communities, but that local citizens have more control over the schools in smaller, more homogeneous communities. He concludes "While educators tend to dominate local educational policy making, they usually operate within significant and generally neglected constraints imposed by the local community or school board - not to mention

those imposed by state and national forces."

Sakal (1977) also studied policy making and found that board members, in contrast to the bulk of the literature, shared policy decision making with their superintendent. Board control was over salaries, construction, finance and personnel, but curriculum planning was left to the administration. Wright (1977) focused on the perceptions of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of board members and superintendents in nine areas. At the .05 level, significant differences were found in 91 of 100 tested perceptions.

A view which reflects these changes (Just, 1980, pp. 421-435) portrayed the political environment of school board elections as a forerunner of change in education with emphasis on the years 1975-1980. The vested interest groups in her view have polarized school boards and brought them into the mainstream of political activity. She states:

> As education moves increasingly into open competition with other public services for constrained financial resources, school board members may be seeking through party affiliation the mechanism to cope with the presence of diverse interest groups at the local level and to seek influence at the state and federal levels which have placed numerous mandates on school districts.

This can be contrasted to a conclusion made by Tucker and Zeigler (1980, p. 232), "The overall picture is one of public and school board deference to educational experts."

But it should not be forgotten that policy is created through a political process. A growing interest in policy was attributed by Cistone (1977, p. 90) to a loss of confidence in our present democratic institutions of government. Certainly school boards' policy making must satisfy the needs of a local community. Researching board members' views would reflect this public need.

An original study was undertaken using a perception questionnaire devised by Sakal (1977) which was sent to 62 districts in New Jersey. Thirty-one elected school boards and their superintendents were matched with thirty-one appointed school boards and their superintendents in two size categories of EQVAL, or equalized valuation per pupil, and three sizes of pupil enrollment figures. Replies were received from chief school administrators and board of education members. Two way analysis of variance and multiple comparison procedures were applied to the data as appropriate. (Godfrey, 1983).

This study sought to determine and compare the perceptions of both school board members and superintendents in determining policy. The instrument used was a forty-two item questionnaire with a five point scale. Each item presented board members and their superintendents with choices of the perceived amount of involvement in decision making. The five alternative responses consiste of:

1. controlled by the board alone;
2. shared between the board and the superintendent but influenced mostly by the board;
3. shared about equally between the board and the superintendent;
4. shared between the board and the superintendent but influenced mostly by the superintendent;
5. controlled by the superintendent alone.

The forty-two items were grouped for purposes of analysis into eight subtests: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative. The study also sought to determine the interactions between the two subject groups and the two types of school districts on the mean scores of respondents in each of the eight categories.

Null Hypothesis One There are no significant differences in the perceptions of superintendents in districts with elected and appointed school boards as to who decides policy in eight areas: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative. To test this null hypothesis, two by two analysis of variance procedures were employed.

The pupil personnel subtest yielded an F value of 5.49 and was significant at the .05 level of significance. The public relations subtest had an F value of 6.64 and was significant at the .01 level of significance. The other six subtests had F values from .02 to 1.68 and were not significant. Because there was no significant interaction between the type of district and the respondents, the null hypotheses of no significant differences on the pupil personnel and public relations subtests were, therefore, rejected. However, since there was an interaction of .06 on the pupil personnel subtest, the t test was used to compare superintendents in districts with elected and appointed school boards on this subtest. The computed t-value of 5.95 with df=40 was significant at the .01 level. There were significant differences between the perceptions of elected and appointed school boards on the pupil personnel subtest.

On the pupil personnel subtest of six items, the superintendents in districts with appointed boards perceived a much greater control, 14.19, than superintendents in districts with elected school boards, 16.24. The superintendents in the districts with the appointed school boards were closer to the influenced mostly by the superintendent, while the superintendents in the districts with the elected school boards were closer to the shared equally scores. In public relations both superintendents in districts with elected school boards and

in districts with appointed school boards had scores which were below the shared equally score, but again the superintendents in the districts with appointed school boards felt they had more control than superintendents in districts with elected school boards. In Sakal's study superintendents were used to validate the questionnaire. Board members in this study felt public relations and transportation were under their control.

Null Hypothesis Two There are no significant differences in the perceptions of school board members in districts with elected and appointed school boards as to who decides policy in eight areas: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative. To test this null hypothesis, two by two analysis of variance procedures were employed.

The pupil personnel subtest yielded an F value of 5.49 and was significant at the .05 level. The public relations subtest had an F value of 6.64 and was significant at the .01 level. The other six subtests had F values from .12 to 1.68 and were not significant. Because there was no significant interaction between the type of district and the respondents the null hypotheses on the pupil personnel and public relations subtests were, therefore, rejected. However, since there was an interaction of .06 on the pupil personnel subtest, an t test was used to compare elected and appointed school boards on the subtest. The computed t-value of .13 was not significant. The null hypothesis of no significant differences on the pupil personnel subtest failed to be rejected.

The pupil personnel subtest differences for school boards were very small and both elected and appointed school boards were close to the shared about equally between the superintendent and the school board. However, on the public relations subtest the school boards differed considerably. Although both scores were above 12, which meant both types of school boards felt they

had more control than the shared equally designation on the scale, the board members in districts with the elected school boards felt considerably greater control in decision making.

Null Hypothesis Three There are no significant differences in the perceptions of superintendents and school board members in districts with elected school boards as to who decides policy in the eight areas: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative. To test this stated null hypothesis two by two analysis of variance procedures were employed.

The instructional program subtest yielded an F value of 14.42 and was significant at the .01 level. The staff personnel subtest had an F value of 5.73 and was significant at the .01 level. The pupil personnel subtest had an F value of 7.70 and was significant at the .01 level. The transportation subtest had an .05 level of significance and an F value of 4.74. The administrative subtest also showed significance at the .01 level with an F value of 11.31. The null hypothesis was rejected on these six subtests. The other two subtests had F values of .09 and .01 and were not significant. Because there was no significant interaction between the type of district and the respondents, the null hypotheses of no significant differences on the six subtests were rejected. However, since there was an interaction of .06 on the pupil personnel subtest, an t test was used to compare superintendents and board members in districts with elected school boards. The computed t-value of 1.19 was not significant. Therefore, the pupil personnel subtest failed to be rejected.

Discussion on the five subtests which had significant differences follows. The instructional program subtest had the superintendents perceiving control fairly close to the influenced mostly by the superintendent, but the school board gave this function a score much closer to being shared equally by the board and superintendent. Staff personnel had differences between the superintendent and school board because the superintendents perceived control below

the mid-point between shared equally and influenced mostly by the board, while school board members perceived they were less than half a point from the influenced mostly by the board score. On the public relations subtest, the superintendent perceived slightly greater control than the shared equally score, while the school board members were nearly mid-way between the shared equally and influenced mostly by the board score. On the administrative subtest, the superintendents perceived control slightly greater than mid-way between the controlled by the superintendent alone and influenced mostly by the superintendent, while board members were near the influenced mostly by the superintendent score. Again on the transportation subtest, the superintendent gravitated toward the score which perceived control by them while the school board members chose a shared equally perception.

Null Hypothesis Four There are no significant differences in the perceptions of superintendents and board members in districts with appointed school boards as to who decides policy in eight areas: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative. To test this stated null hypothesis, two by two analysis of variance procedures were employed.

The instructional program subtest yielded an F value of 14.42 and was significant at the .01 level. The staff personnel subtest had an F value of 5.73 and was significant at the .01 level. The pupil personnel subtest had an F value of 7.70 and was significant at the .01 level. The public relations subtest indicated an F value of 9.70 and was significant at the .01 level. The transportation subtest had an .05 level of significance and an F value of 4.74. The administrative subtest also showed significance at the .01 level with an F value of 11.31. Because there was no significant interaction between

the type of district and the respondents, the null hypotheses of no significant differences on the six subtests was rejected. However, since there was an interaction of .06 on the pupil personnel subtest, an t test was used to compare superintendents and board members in districts with appointed school boards. The computed t-value of 3.62 was significant at the .01 level. The other two subtests had values of .09 and .01 and were not significant.

Discussion of the six subtests that had significant differences follows. School board members and superintendents in appointed districts showed the same patterns as elected school boards on the instructional program, staff personnel, transportation and administrative subtests in hypothesis three. The most noticeable differences were on the pupil personnel and public relations subtests. The superintendents in districts with appointed school boards showed a greater perception of influence in this function than was true in comparison between superintendents and school boards in districts with elected school boards. On the pupil personnel and public relations subtests the school boards in districts that were appointed assumed a perception close to the shared equally position.

Null Hypothesis Five There are no significant differences among the interactions of the five categories of mean scores in the eight areas: instructional program; staff personnel; pupil personnel; public relations; school plant; transportation; finance; and administrative; within the categories of elected and appointed school boards for the perceptions of superintendents and board members. This null hypothesis was tested by two way analysis of variance. No significant differences were found.

Educational administration texts typically describe the function of the superintendent and school administrators as "Implementation of general school policy formulated by the board of education." (Knezevich, 1969, p. 234). But it was the "municipal reform movement at the turn of this century" created by corruption in government and the belief that "nonpartisanship and professional administrative expertise" (Boyd, 1973) was the efficient way to run cities that bolstered the leadership role of the superintendent of schools. This sentiment continues to be perpetuated in educational administration. One example of this is expressed by Tucker and Ziegler (1980, p. 2): "The major source of power is information and the new norm of policy decision-making is deference to expertise." The American School Board Journal (Underwood, Fortune & Meyer, 1983, p. 26) in reporting their latest poll found board members have a differing view: "School boards - not superintendents - should make essential policy decisions for their schools." The results of this study would tend to confirm this disparity of viewpoints.

Significant differences on six of the eight subtests comparing school boards and superintendents would suggest agreement with Wright's findings (1977, p. 173) and Stirling's(1966, p. 62) that there are few areas of agreement between boards of education and chief school officers on their responsibilities. This study agrees with Sakal's study (1977) that elected school board members are involved in policy making and the subtest scores he obtained. However, he did not test superintendent's perceptions. The questionnaire used clearly referred to boards and superintendents working together in decision making. The significant differences must be analyzed in this perspective.

Educational administration guidelines (Wennerberg, 1967) suggest the school board sets policy and the superintendents administer it. Does the

lack of agreement of the superintendents' role with board member perceptions suggest superintendents should reevaluate the need for public support? Boyd (1973) maintains that the superintendent is unable to be a political strategist and also points out that the strategic advantages of the superintendent being viewed as a "nonpolitical expert" can be detrimental because it may cause them to ignore factions in the community and inhibit them from assuming the needed role of political strategist. The significant differences between types of school boards on the pupil personnel and public relations subtests in which elected boards perceive greater control in policy making than appointed school boards lend support to Iannaccone and Lutz's contention (1970) that election of school board members and defeat of incumbents makes them more responsive to the community.

Perhaps the field of educational administration should include more theory in the dynamics of local politics. The Mayor-City Manager form of government may offer some clues as a parallel especially where the elected city council members appoint the city manager.

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